

Testimony in opposition to HB 6350:
An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2015

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Debbie Poerio, and I am the President/CEO of Integrated Health Services, who has administered East Hartford's School Based Health Center Program for 20 years.

I am submitting written testimony in opposition to HB 6350, *An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2015*, and its impact on School Based Health Centers (SBHCs). In an effort to be succinct, I will identify my concerns with the proposed cuts below.

1. Reduction of ~\$500,000 EACH YEAR to the current baseline of operational funding for SBHCs.

- In December 2012, the Governor rescinded more than a \$500,000 from School Based Health Centers as part of his deficit reduction plan. The half-million dollars was taken from the \$1.3 million dollars that had just been allocated by the Legislature for the new/expanded sites. Since the entire allocation for new or expanded health centers has been proposed to be eliminated in the FY2014 and FY2015 budget proposal, the continued reduction is being taken from operational funding to existing school based health centers.
- Funding reductions decrease direct clinical services – less clinical staff time to assess and treat student health problems and provide preventive care to keep them healthy and in school.
- While we understand the shared sacrifice we all have to make during these difficult fiscal times, the plan to annualize the rescission paired with the proposed elimination of expanded SBHC funding in the Alliance Districts equals a 15% decrease to the total state funding for the program.

2. Elimination of funding for new or expanded SBHCs in the Educational Alliance Districts

- This contradicts the intent of the Governor's Education Reform Initiative, in which the Legislature allocated \$1.3 million dollars to fund 22 new or expanded School Based Health Centers in the Alliance Districts for FY 2012.
- FY 2012 Funding of this Initiative was just released through a Request for Proposal by the Department of Public Health which will be awarded by May, 2013, and would therefore result in creating 22 new/expanded SBHCs that would only be open from May-June 30, with no continuation of the funding if the Governor's reductions are allowed to stand for the FY 2013 budget. Surely the legislature did not intend to invest in opening new SBHCs only to close them within 6 weeks.

These reductions follow too closely on the heels of Sandy Hook, a time when the Governor and President have committed to the need to invest in the provision of mental health services to our children, and identifies that the best place to provide them is through the SBHCs. School Based Health Centers eliminate such barriers to care, particularly to mental health care, including location, cost, and the social stigma that prevents many children, adolescents, and families from accessing the care they need. SBHC providers are specialists who are trained to meet the unique needs of children and adolescents. The SBHC model that provides treatment in the school allows for more systematic detection, assessment, treatment, and essential care coordination that ensures our students are healthy, and ready to learn.

I urge you to not only to avoid these drastic reductions to School Based Health Center services, but to invest in the expansion and creation of new SBHCs. For so many children and families, the SBHC is the safety net that keeps children in school and parents at work.

Thank you.